

The Quotable Ike

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The Quotable Ike

Late in the Second Administration of President Eisenhower, he asked General John S. Bragdon to review the Interstate Highway Program to determine if changes were needed to resolve funding problems that developed when the program was accelerated to combat a recession. As part of the review, Bragdon asked the White House for a summary of the President's statements on the subject beginning in 1955.

On July 12, 1960, Emmett Welch sent a memorandum to Floyd D. Peterson of Bragdon's office summarizing the President's statements. Welch's summary made six points, presented here without citations to the referenced quotes:

1. The President has consistently emphasized the urgency of the program. Without exception, the President has urged pushing forward with the programs; not once has there been any indication of curtailment or slowdown in the program. When funds were inadequate, he proposed increasing revenues or removing expenditure ceilings. He criticized Congress for slowing down the program as compared with what he recommended.
2. Throughout, he has had nothing but words of praise for the program; not once has there been any question regarding the scope, standards, or administration of the program, except in [a statement on signing the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1959] in which he announced the study by the Special Assistant for Public Works Planning.
3. [The President's Special Message to Congress Regarding a National Highway Program, February 22, 1955] is of particular interest since it sets forth the President's specific recommendations for the Interstate Highway Program. There is nothing in this statement (or elsewhere in the President's statements) which indicates that the Interstate System should give primary consideration to inter-city vs intra-city traffic. He speaks of "a vast system of interconnected highways criss-crossing the country . . ." He speaks of the need for quick evacuation of cities in event of atomic attack (an impossibility unless there is adequate feeder and connecting routes with adequate capacity on the main routes to handle the total traffic-not just the inter-city traffic). He says further, "existing traffic jams only faintly foreshadow those of ten years hence unless the present rate of highway improvements and development is increased. To correct these deficiencies is an obligation of Government at every level." The prospective traffic jams he speaks of would arise primarily from intra-city not inter-city traffic. He goes on to state, "In the case of the Federal Government, moreover, expenditures on a highway program are a return to the highway user of the taxes which he pays in connection with his use of the highways." (This includes intra-city users as well as inter-city users).

Both the President and the Clay Committee report said the Interstate System should include the "most essential urban arterial connections." Admittedly, these words are subject to varying interpretation. However, if the intent were to limit the inclusion to "connections with principal urban routes," I believe the President and the Clay Committee would have so stated, or would not have mentioned connections at all since access connections are essential if a highway is to have any use. It is my interpretation, therefore, that both the President and the Clay Committee intended to include "essential urban arterial connecting routes." This interpretation is further strengthened by a statement in the Clay Committee Report, page 1, "The President specifically called for a 'grand plan for a properly articulated (highway) system that solves the problems of speedy, safe, transcontinental travel - intercity transportation - access highways - and farm-to-farm movements - metropolitan area congestion - bottlenecks - and parking'." (The Clay Committee report on page 16 states that the interstate network should include not only the improvement of certain urban arterials, but also "will require provision (in congested areas) for major feeder and distribution routes which at present are not included within any of the Federal-Aid systems."

4. At first, the President urged that the rate of construction of the program should not be limited to the increasing revenues from user taxes and the limited use of tolls, but should be financed with bonds which would be paid off by pledging to that purpose, user taxes and tolls over the useful life of the roads. When it was reported to the President that members of Congress proposed increasing user taxes to pay for the roads, the President objected and supported his original proposal for financing. Each succeeding statement was less specific and more compromising in tone. [His Annual Message to Congress, January 5, 1956] merely asked for "an adequate plan of financing."

Later, the President clearly endorsed the pay-as-you-go basis for financing adopted by Congress.

5. The President has stressed the importance of planning and constructing the entire Interstate System on a coordinated basis.
6. The President specifically stated that he favors continuing past practices of leaving primary responsibility for planning and designing highways with the States-the major contribution from the Federal Government being financing.

Attachment - President Eisenhower's Statements Regarding the Interstate Highway Program

July 7, 1960

PRESIDENT EISENHOWER'S STATEMENTS REGARDING THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY PROGRAM

1. State of the Union Message - January 6, 1955

"A modern, efficient highway system is essential to meet the needs of our growing population, our expanding economy, and our national security. We are accelerating our highway improvement program as rapidly as possible under existing State and Federal laws and authorizations. However, this effort will not in itself assure our people of an adequate highway system... I shall submit on January 27, detailed recommendations which will meet our most pressing national highway needs."

2. Annual Budget Message - January 17, 1955

"For the coming year, I am recommending that we start a 10-year program to modernize the interstate system in cooperation with State and local governments In the past decade and a half we have not kept pace with the rapidly growing needs for highways adequate for economic development and national security. I plan to send a special message to Congress in the near future recommending a program of coordinating action by Federal, State, and local governments, to overcome major highway deficiencies."

3. Annual Message on the Economic Report - January 20, 1955

"A great ten-year program to modernize the interstate system shall be authorized."

4. Special Message to Congress Regarding a National Highway Program - February 22, 1955:

". . . The ceaseless flow of information throughout the Republic is matched by individual and commercial movement over a vast system of interconnected highways criss-crossing the country and joining at our national borders with friendly neighbors to the north and south The Nation's highway system is a gigantic enterprise, one of our largest items of capital investment But in large part, the network is inadequate for

the nation's growing needs All three (Governors' Conference, Clay Committee, Departmental Committee) were confronted with inescapable evidence that action, comprehensive and quick and forward-looking, is needed." The President then cited: first, cost of accidents; second, the economic losses due to high transportation costs caused by high vehicle operating costs resulting from the deteriorated physical condition of the existing road network; third, quick evacuation of cities in event of atomic attack; fourth, with increasing GNP, population, and vehicle traffic, "existing traffic jams only faintly foreshadow those of ten years hence unless the present rate of highway improvement and development is increased. To correct these deficiencies is an obligation of government at every level. The highway system is a public enterprise. As the owner and operator, the various levels of Government have a responsibility for management that promotes the economy of the nation and properly serves the individual user. In the case of the Federal Government, moreover, expenditures on a highway program are a return to the highway user of the taxes which he pays in connection with his use of the highways. Congress has recognized the national interest in the principal roads by authorizing two Federal-aid systems, selected cooperatively by the States, local units and the Bureau of Public Roads. The Federal-aid primary system as of July 1, 1954, consisted of 234,407 miles, connecting all the principal cities, county seats, ports, manufacturing areas and other traffic generating centers Because some sections of the primary system, from the viewpoint of national interest are more important than others, the Congress in 1944 authorized the selection of a special network, not to exceed 40,000 miles in length, which would connect by routes, as direct as practicable, the principal metropolitan areas, cities and industrial centers, serve the national defense, and connect with routes of continental importance in the Dominion of Canada and the Republic of Mexico. This National System of Interstate Highways, although it embraces only 1.2% of total road mileage . . . carries more than a seventh of all traffic, a fifth of the rural traffic, and serves 65% of the urban and 45% of the rural population The Interstate System must be given top priority in construction planning. But at the current rate of development, the Interstate network would not reach even a reasonable level of extent and efficiency in half a century. State highway departments cannot effectively meet the need The obvious responsibility to be accepted by the Federal Government, in addition to the existing Federal interest in our 3,366,000-mile network of highways, is the development of the Interstate System with its most essential urban arterial connections. In its report, The Advisory Committee recommends that the Federal Government assume principal responsibility for the cost of a modern Interstate Network to be completed by 1964 to include the most essential urban arterial connections A sound Federal highway program, I believe, can and should stand on its own feet, with highway users providing the total dollars necessary for improvement and new construction. Financing of interstate and Federal-aid systems should be based on the planned use of increasing revenues from present gas and diesel oil taxes, augmented in limited instances with tolls. I am inclined to the view that it is sounder to finance this program by special bond issues, to be paid off by the above-mentioned revenues which will be collected during the useful life of the roads and pledged to this purpose, rather than by an increase in general revenue obligations."

5. News Conference - June 29, 1955:

Question: "Democrats in the House have been proposing and pushing a plan to finance long-range highway building by drastic increases in taxes on tires and gasoline. Have you any comments, Sir?"

The President: "Yes, first of all, I think everybody agrees that America needs roads, needs them badly, and needs them now, and they ought to be built on a coordinated, comprehensive basis, and that building ought to start. Now, the question of financing raises problems. Either you must find some way to finance these things out of current revenues as you go along, which means very greatly increased taxes, and in this case that would be on related products, gasoline, tires, and so on, or you must find some method of having a bond issue. If you had the bond issue, then you have the problem: do you want to add it to the national debt or do you want to put it under a special organization in which liquidation is provided for, and which will get this whole sum of debt off our books as rapidly as possible. The Governors and the Clay Committee recommended a bond issue which would be liquidating under a U. S. Corporation. Now, here is one of the reasons against just raising taxes and trying to do it that way, getting in a lot of revenue and building that much each year: where are the States going to get the money to do their part of this thing? It seems to me that we have got to recognize occasionally, the very great responsibility, authority, and powers that should reside in our States, allowing them to have decent

sources of revenue. If we put the maximum amount that the traffic will bear on all those things, I don't know where the States' revenue is going to come from. So we devised a plan that we thought met the needs of the situation in the best possible fashion, and I am for it now just as strongly as I was when it was devised by the Governors and the Clay Committee."

6. News Conference - August 5, 1955

Question: "Do you plan to make a new proposal for financing the method of construction (highways):"

The president: "I did say in my original recommendations that I recognized there could be more than one method of financing, but at a time when we wanted to allocate certain user type of money to the paying of those roads, we needed the roads now, and when Congress very definitely, and I think maybe a lot more people do not want to raise the public debt, there remained one method: the corporation or the authority method. And that is the one I proposed. I might accept some modifications, of course I would. But what I want first of all is roads, and then a way to pay for it that will be acceptable and fair to the taxpayers."

7. White House Statements Following Meetings with Republican Leaders of Congress - December 12, 1955

". . . The Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of Commerce then joined in a discussion of recommendations for a highway construction bill. It was agreed there was an urgent need for the Congress to pass at the 1956 Session, a workable highway program to build up the nation's roads."

8. Annual Message to Congress - January 5, 1956

"Legislation to provide a modern, interstate highway system is even more urgent this year than last, for 12 months have now passed in which we have fallen further behind in road construction needed for the personal safety, the general property, the national security of the American people In my message of February 22, 1955 I urged that measures be taken to complete the vital 40,000 mile interstate system over a period of 10 years at an estimated Federal cost of approximately 25 billion dollars. No program was adopted.

"If we are ever to solve our mounting traffic problem, the whole interstate system must be authorized as one project, to be completed approximately within the specific time. Only in this way can the required planning and engineering be accomplished without the confusion and waste unavoidable in a piecemeal approach. Furthermore, as I pointed out last year, the pressing nature of this problem must not lead us to solutions outside the bounds of sound fiscal management. As in the case of other pressing problems, there must be an adequate plan of financing. To continue the drastically needed improvement in our other national highway systems, I recommend the continuation of the Federal Aid Highway Program."

9. Annual Budget Message - January 16, 1956

". . . I am proposing both legislative action and increased appropriations to improve and expand our basic transportation facilities, especially the Interstate Highway System Highways - Obviously, a greatly improved highway system is vital for both economic development and national defense, as well as to reduce traffic deaths and injuries. The Federal Government has a special interest in completing as early as possible, the 40,000 miles of the Interstate Highway System, which connects major centers of population and industry. Last February in a special message to the Congress, I endorsed the recommendation of an advisory committee that the Federal Government assume the principal responsibility for financing completion of this key highway network. This program is even more urgently needed today. I consider it essential that construction of the interstate system be fully authorized now as a single integrated program in order that it may be accomplished over a period of approximately 10 years with the greatest economy"

10. Annual Message on the Economic Report - January 24, 1956

"The country urgently needs a modernized interstate highway system to relieve existing congestion, to provide for the expected growth of motor vehicle traffic, to strengthen the Nation's defenses, to reduce the toll of human life exacted each year in highway accidents, and to promote economic development."

11. News conference - April 25, 1956

Question: "Mr. President, would you care to comment on the revised highway bill which is about to be taken up by the House?"

The President: ". . . We need highways badly, very badly, and I am in favor of any forward, constructive step in this field."

12. Statement by the President in Response to a Progress Report on Highways by the Secretary of Commerce - August 16, 1956

". . . I am gratified to observe the initial speed with which this important program is developing. I am hopeful that the States will continue to move swiftly in advancing final project applications for construction. Prompt State action will help alleviate the great deficiencies in our highway systems and will convert the Federal fund authorizations into useable roads at the earliest possible time."

13. Campaign speech at University of Kentucky Coliseum in Lexington, Kentucky - October 1, 1956

"I see an America where a mighty network of highways spreads across our country."

14. Letter to Harlow H. Curtice, Chairman, The President's Committee for Traffic Safety, on the Highway Modernization Program - November 20, 1956

"The 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act established a "grand plan" for the rebuilding of our obsolete road and street system. It provides substantial financial aid to the States over a thirteen-year period for construction. In addition, the Federal Government will do everything it properly can do to expedite the completion of the program. A safe and efficient road network is absolutely essential to curtailment of death and injury from accidents, as well as to the national defense and to our expanding economy. Federal action is only the beginning, however. There is likewise the big and complex task of acquiring the necessary rights of way, of designing, building and operating the highways. These are responsibilities that belong primarily to the States themselves and their local communities. The 1956 Act wisely carried forward intact the traditional Federal-State partnership which has been so effective in the development of America's Highway System. On a program of this magnitude and urgency, obviously the State and local highway agencies face numerous problems which must be solved as promptly as possible. They will need all the help they can get. Most of all, they will need the kind of informed support which only come from wide and thorough public understanding."

15. Annual Budget Message - January 16, 1957

"Through grants paid from the Highway Trust Fund, the States, in partnership with the Federal Government, are beginning a 13-year program to complete construction of the Interstate Highway System."

16. Annual Budget Message - January 13, 1958

"When the Government provides a service conferring a special quasi-commercial benefit on identifiable individuals or groups above and beyond the benefits to the public generally, I believe it should charge the beneficiaries for the special service, rather than place the full burden of cost on the general taxpayer. This principle has been put into practice in the financing of the new highway program through the payment of excise taxes by highway users into a highway Trust Fund."

17. Letter to Minority Congressional Leaders concerning measures to aid Economic Growth - March 9, 1958

"In the next few days the Administration will ask Congress to amend the Highway Act to suspend certain expenditure limitations for three years."

18. Remarks at Sixth Annual Republican Women's National Conference - March 18, 1958

"A sharp advance in expenditures for Federal-aid to highways is already taking place under the new budget. And I have asked Congress to amend the Highway Act to suspend certain expenditure ceilings for three years"

19. Statement by the President upon signing the Federal Highway Act of 1958 - April 16, 1958

"I have today signed . . . the Federal Highway Act of 1958 . . . with serious misgivings The principal factors influencing me toward favorable action are three. The first is the desirability of speeding up the construction of our badly needed system of Interstate Highways The second is the hope that . . . some impetus may be given to . . . efforts to increase employment. The third is the temporary character of what I believe to be the faulty provisions of the bill The expansion and improvement of our roads and highways have been major factors in the development of our economy and will continue to be so in the years ahead. Nevertheless, the defects to which I refer seem to me to be so serious that I am constrained to invite special attention to them in the hope they will be completely eliminated in future legislation. The first is the violation of the long established principle of a 50-50 sharing of Federal-aid highway programs other than the Interstate System The second is the provision for Federal advances to State Governments to finance most of this one-third share authorized by this legislation."

20. Letter to Sinclair Weeks, accepting his resignation - October 24, 1958

"You ought to take particular pride in recalling the vast Highway Program undertaken in 1954 - the greatest in the history of our country."

21. Campaign Speech, Charleston, West Virginia - October 27, 1958

"After the first allocation of mileage to West Virginia, there were representations made by Senator Revercomb, and by your then chairman, Senator [Hoblitzell], as to the greater need of West Virginia, and that allotment of highway was more than doubled."

22. Campaign speech, Baltimore, Maryland - October 31, 1958

"We are busily engaged in the construction of a gigantic road system which will build more than 40,000 miles of superhighways."

23. Special Message to Congress - May 13, 1959

"In setting up the Interstate Highway Program in 1956, Congress provided that it be conducted on a pay-as-you-go basis and, to accomplish this purpose, established the Highway Trust Fund Legislation enacted last year, however, has increased the rate at which money is being spent It will be impossible this year, without Congressional action, to apportion funds needed I recommend a temporary increase of 1-1/2¢ a gallon in the gas tax."

24. Statement re Financing Interstate Highway System - June 25, 1959

"I have consistently requested the Congress to maintain the pay-as-you-go principle which was embodied in the Highway Act of 1956. With this in mind on January 1 I recommended a temporary increase of 1-1/2 cents in

the gas tax to provide revenues to meet anticipated deficits beginning in fiscal year 1960. I am deeply concerned that no action has been taken on this proposal This is a critical situation in our national road-building program, and one which should give great concern to every motorist"

25. Special Message to Congress - August 25, 1959

"As I have repeatedly stated, there is an urgent need for legislation to allow the Interstate Highway Program to proceed at a steady rate. Both the Congress and the Executive are justly proud of the vast highway construction program enacted in 1956. A good beginning has been made . . . [but] it is essential that we continue to build new, modern roads The recent action in approving an increase of 1 cents in the gas tax for two years is a step in the right direction."

26. Statement following the adjournment of Congress - September 20, 1959

"The Congress finally agreed to a support of the national highway program, but at a lower rate than I recommended."

27. Statement upon signing the Federal-aid Highway Act of 1959 - September 21, 1959

"I have approved the Federal-aid Highway Act of 1959. Although the bill does not meet these objectives (a recommended increase of 1-1/2¢ in the gas tax) I have approved it in order to avoid a serious disruption of the highway program At my direction there has been underway since July a comprehensive review of the interstate program's current policies, practices, methods and standards - including an examination of the relative Federal, State, and local responsibilities for planning, financing, and supervising the program. This study is being conducted by the Special Assistant to the President for Public Works Planning, General John S. Bragdon, in collaboration with the Secretary of Commerce and Director of the Bureau of the Budget. If actions are needed to insure that our national objectives are being achieved at minimum Federal cost on a pay-as-you-go basis, it is expected that the necessary recommendations will be developed by this study."
